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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000482

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SUBJECT: MALI USING TUAREG MILITIAS TO COMBAT TUAREG REBELS

REF: A. BAMAKO 00435

[1](#)B. BAMAKO 00463

[1](#)C. BAMAKO 00419

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: On May 29 the Embassy spoke to Kader Bah, a close confidante of President Amadou Toumani Toure and Minister of Territorial Administration Kafougouna Kone, about tensions in the northern Malian city of Kidal. For the past two nights the Malian military has fired heavy artillery around Kidal as "warning" shots to Tuareg rebel groups positioned outside the town. Bah confirmed reports that the Malian government is supporting a Tuareg militia composed of ethnic Imghad Tuaregs led by Col. Elhadj Gamou. The Malians are using this militia to combat rebel groups composed largely of ethnic Ifoghas Tuaregs by playing off Imghad-Ifoghas tensions dating back to the 1991-1996 rebellion. Several northern officers of the Malian military have reportedly refused to fight along side Gamou's militias citing fears of increased "tribalism" and the militia's paramilitary status. Later on May 29 the Embassy met with Alghabass Intallah, the National Assembly Deputy from Kidal, and Ahmada ag Bibi, the spokesman for the Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC). Intallah and ag Bibi warned President Toure and Minister Kone earlier this week of the dangers of creating paramilitary units based on ethnicity. Ag Bibi asked the President to officially recognize a cease-fire to allow the disparate Tuareg rebel factions time to regroup in Tamanrasset under Algerian supervision to select a point-person for the Tuareg rebel movement. Since the Malians have mounted only one offensive engagement since the current crisis began in August 2007, ag Bibi's demand for a cease-fire declaration from President Toure seems remarkably misplaced. End Summary.

Mali Using Irregular Tuareg Militias

2.(C) On May 29 Kader Bah confirmed that the Malian government is using irregular Tuareg militia units composed of ethnic Imghads to counter Tuareg rebels groups in northern Mali. The militias are commanded by Col. Elhadj Gamou, who is a senior commander of military forces in Kidal. Gamou is also a Tuareg belonging to the Imghad tribe. During the 1991-1996 rebellion he belonged to the Revolutionary Army for the Liberation of the Azawad (ARLA) - a rebel group composed primarily of Imghads. Bah said the Malian government helped Gamou constitute an irregular militia of fellow Imghads using many of the arms and ammunition captured by the Imghad group that attacked the gendarme base in Ansongo in the region of Gao on May 12 (Ref. A).

3.(C) Bah said President Toure decided last week to once

again give Minister of Territorial Administration, General Kafougouna Kone, the authority to lead Mali's response to the Tuareg crisis. General Kone negotiated the Algiers Accords in July 2006 on Mali's behalf but subsequently faded from view. Bah said General Kone and Minister of Internal Security Sadio Gassama were now charged with overseeing the north but that neither the Minister of Defense, Natie Pleah, nor the Director of State Security, Col. Mamy Coulibaly, were willing to share information with Kone and Gassama.

ADC Leaders in Bamako

4.(C) Later on May 29 the Embassy met with two Tuareg National Assembly Deputies from northern Mali, Alghabass Intallah and ADC spokesman Ahmada ag Bibi. Alghabass Intallah's father is the Amenokal, or traditional leader, of Kidal Tuaregs. Alghabass is in his late twenties or early thirties. At about six foot five inches in height, the soft-spoken, gangly Alghabass's youth is counter-balanced by his central place within Malian Tuareg's traditional hierarchy. In contrast to his elder brother, Mohamed who is also a National Assembly Deputy, Alghabass appeared reflective and relatively well-educated. Ag Bibi and Alghabass informed President Toure and General Kone earlier in the week of the dangers of using an ethnic based militia led by Col. Gamou to combat Tuareg rebels.

5.(C) Alghabass questioned Mali's interest in implementing the Algiers Accords and said that "a bad warrior cannot make

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war or peace." He noted that while Foreign Minister Moctar Ouane was proclaiming Algeria's decision to resume its mediation efforts, other arms of the Malian government were working with Col. Gamou to stand up paramilitary units. Tuaregs believe National Assembly vice-president, Assarid ag Imbarkawen, who like Gamou is an Ighmad Tuareg from the Gao region, is also involved in the creation of the militia units. Alghabass said one of the militia leaders is Ahmoudou Badi and reminded the Embassy that Badi was convicted for the 1999 carjacking and killing a Danish citizen working for Maersk. Badi "escaped" from prison in 2004.

6.(C) Alghabass and ag Bibi said that the May 21 attack on the Malian garrison in Abeibara (Ref. B) was in retaliation for the April 10 execution of two ADC members and also the attempted rape and stabbing of a Tuareg woman in Abeibara by a Malian soldier. Ag Bibi said the Malian soldier, named Cheikhna, was among the 50-60 hostages the ADC claims to have captured during the attack. Kader Bah estimated that the number of hostages held by the ADC, in addition to the 33 still held by Ibrahim Bahanga, was closer to 20 or 30 but admitted that he did not have exact details. The number of Malian soldiers killed on May 21 also remains unclear. Officially the Malians have said that 10 soldiers were killed. Bah said the figure was likely closer to 25 or 30, which tracks with ADC claims.

7.(C) The ADC is demanding a reduction of government forces in the north and recognition of an official cease-fire from President Toure. "We see the military as an occupying army," said Alghabass. He also warned that the ADC commander who lead the May 6 attack in Diabali (Ref. C) north of Segou "could do the same thing in Koulikoro" which is less than an hour north of Bamako.

8.(C) Ag Bibi said the cease-fire declaration was needed in order to enable the disparate Tuareg rebel movements time to organize a meeting in Tamanrasset in neighboring Algeria to choose someone capable of speaking on behalf of all Kidal Tuaregs. Ag Bibi clearly thinks that as ADC spokesperson he is the best candidate for this role - a decision likely not shared others within the ADC and rebels like Ibrahim Bahanga. Ag Bibi said it was possible that ADC leader Iyad ag Ghali

could return from Saudi Arabia to serve, once again, as the point person for the Tuareg rebel movement as he did during the 1990s.

Comment: Tuareg vs. Tuareg in Northern Mali

9.(C) Mali's decision to constitute militias composed of Imghad Tuareg civilians, bandits and apparently a convicted murderer has introduced inter-ethnic conflict into the current crisis and given paramilitary units that are not within the military chain of command free rein to roam northern Mali. The militias have reportedly angered several Malian military officers who are from northern Mali but are not Imghad Tuaregs who fear that Col. Gamou will use the militias to settle old scores with Ifoghas and other groups. Allegations of government-sanctioned militias represent a disturbing new development for the security situation in Mali's far north. While President Toure has underlined on many occasions his commitment to a negotiated solution, he is clearly running out of options, which makes the need for active and useful engagement by Algeria all the more critical.
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